

**ON THE NATURE OF RETHINKING PROPHETIC LITERATURE:  
STIRRING A NEGLECTED STEW  
(A RESPONSE TO DAVID L. PETERSEN)<sup>1</sup>**

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***1 Introduction***

In a contribution to a 1997 collection of papers, David L. Petersen sets himself the task of “Rethinking the Nature of Prophetic Literature”. Petersen’s contention is that the complexity of prophetic literature is typically underestimated by scholars. He concludes that scholars face the challenge of “enabling various critical perspectives to interact in mutually informative dialogue” (1997:35). This conclusion is the premise of the present paper. Yet, a critical look at Petersen’s rethinking reveals that he himself has not sufficiently rethought the nature of the Hebrew Bible’s prophetic literature. Moreover, his critique of existing scholarship has closed more doors than it opens in terms of what sort of multi-disciplinary dialogue is needed.

After a summary of Petersen’s paper, I will offer a critique of its internal inconsistencies and shortcomings. I will then turn attention to the different historical paradigms under which Petersen and I work. I will then elaborate on how the new paradigm offers a more reliable way into this literature than that which informs Petersen’s work. My discussion will deal with comparative and other social scientific research, the value of literary concerns to historical research, and finally reintroduce role-theory, albeit in a very different manner than that employed by Petersen. This is, admittedly, a very long paper critiquing a relatively short one, but one that I hope is not read simply as a critique of one scholar and his fellow travellers, but as a part of the progressive dialogue Petersen himself is so justified in calling for.

## 2 *Rethinking Prophetic Literature*

### 2.1 *The Stew*

Petersen begins by noting that ‘The Prophets’ (as a canonical grouping) and ‘prophetic literature’ are ambiguous entities. The former has been used to refer to everything in the Hebrew Bible or just the Former and Latter Prophets. Petersen concentrates his efforts, however, on the question, “What is ‘prophetic literature?’” (1997:23). While admitting there is no easy answer, he observes that new patterns of research have only exacerbated the problem while debates continue over form- and redactional-criticism. He adds:

And within the last two decades, various social and literary perspectives (in some cases quite without relevant knowledge of appropriate research have been added to the methodological stew). (1997:23, improperly placed brackets in original.)

Petersen says he will avoid certain “uninformed treatments” to concentrate instead on those of a “special value” for literary study, and naming a study of Jeremiah and a variety of redaction-critical studies of Isaiah which address the book as a “meaningful literary unit” (1997:23 n. 1). He does not, however, discuss why these are superior to other analyses. He then asks, “So, what critical perspectives are appropriate for addressing this question concerning the nature of prophetic literature?” (1997:23-24) To address these issues, Petersen proposes a five-fold typology of prophetic literature.

### 2.2 *Proposed Typology*

Petersen’s typology derives partly from his analysis of the various forms of ancient Israelite intermediation and partly from a form-critical study of the literature that reflects the social activities or the attitudes of the intermediaries themselves.<sup>2</sup> He takes up the four titles of the diverse prophetic roles in ancient Israel that he described in his 1981 book, *The Roles of Israel’s Prophets*. These four (he only later introduces the fifth role-type) point to a time when not every intermediary would be labelled a נָבִיא, a term that eventually came to be the general title for prophet. This was a time when diverse behaviour was the norm. The four role-titles are regarded by Petersen “as something like Weberian ideal types”, by which he means that a certain kind of

activity may characterize one type of intermediary while allowing that a different sort of behaviour may be present too. He also asserts that for each kind of prophetic behaviour one kind of literature will be especially prominent (1997:24).

### 2.2.1 **נִסֵּי** - Seer

The first type of intermediary is the seer whose representative literature type is a narrative labelled divinatory chronicle (1997:24-26, 35). This literature records the consultation of a seer by someone interested in discovering the opinion of the deity. The literature, however, is interested in the actual interaction of the intermediary with the audience, above and beyond the simple recording of the request and response. This interaction is a part of the “standard behavior of that prophet” (e.g., Jer 38:14-28) that involves social interaction not always found in other types of prophetic activity (1997:25). Literature attesting to this large complex of interaction is properly construed as prophetic literature. Other than the seer Samuel in 1 Sam. 9:9, 11, there are examples of the consultative role being performed by persons of differing titles, as is the case in Ezekiel 20; Num. 22:7 and Zechariah 7-8. In these cases, and others besides, prophetic literature attests to the interaction between intermediary and client (1997:25-26).

### 2.2.2 **נִיִּין** - Visionary/Seer

The second category is the seer or visionary. Petersen links this title predominantly to Judahite texts (e.g., Amos 7:12; Isa 29:10; 30:9-10; Mic 3:5-8) (1997:26, and so, too, Wilson, 1980:254-56). In the corresponding literature, the “vocabulary of visions is prominent” even in the editorial formulae, i.e., Isa 1:1, 2:1; Hab 1:1 (1997:26).

Since ancient Israelite writers themselves identified some intermediaries as “seers,” e.g., Gad, as David’s “seer” (2 Sam 24:11), one has *prima facie* grounds for thinking that literature involving visions may be associated with intermediaries who are “visionaries.” And such is the case (Petersen, 1997:26-27, “seer” here does refer to נִיִּין).

Petersen claims a “stronger” contention than usual form-critical arguments. A visionary is not choosing one form from among many in which to express the message, but the form exists as a direct expression of the intermediary’s role as a visionary (1997:27). Thus, the vision report is a “fundamental form of prophetic literature, attesting to one identifiable type of intermediation, that of visionary behavior” (1997:27-28). He does allow that some of these vision reports may represent “self-conscious rhetorical ploys (e.g., Jer 1:11-15)”, but he also maintains that those in Amos, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah should be considered as representing authentic visionary or trance-like experiences (1997:27).

### 2.2.3 נְבִיא - Prophet

The third role-title names those for whom auditory perception and utterance were important (e.g., Jer 1:4-10). Many of the prophets of monarchic-era Israel and Judah can be regarded as members of this group. Petersen writes:

These prophets were speakers, and their utterances were of two basic types: divine oracles, in which the deity speaks in the first person (Hosea 11:1-7); and prophetic sayings, in which the prophet speaks in the first person and refers to Yahweh in the third person (e.g., Mic 3:5-8) (1997:28).

Admixtures of the two forms regularly occur, and so one is advised that they should not be construed as of fundamentally different rhetorical force. These two remarkably diverse forms of prophetic speech make up the bulk of prophetic literature. While there are some genres frequently employed by these figures, great formal latitude was exercised in the formulation of their utterances (1997:28).

### 2.2.4 אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים - Man of God

The fourth type involves the figure known as the man of God, most frequently used in conjunction with Elijah and Elisha. According to Petersen, these “holy men” are not intermediaries in that they repeat divine words or perceive something of the divine world (1997:28). “Rather, they themselves personify the world of the sacred in the profane, but without the ritual requirements associated with priests, who occupy a similar position on the boundary between the sacred and the profane” (1997:28-29). Stories of these holy men are legends stemming from groups of disciples (cf. 2 Kgs 8:4). Although this body of literature was written by

persons other than the prophets themselves, the literature may be considered prophetic in that it “attests to and derives from the exercise of one kind of prophetic activity” (1997:29).

### **2.2.5 Untitled (Prophetic Historians)**

Petersen observes that Mari texts depict people who receive revelations through dreams. “Similarly, I propose that at least one type of Hebrew Bible literature may derive from untitled intermediaries” (1997:29). The producers of the speeches, stories or comments of prophets contained in the so-called deuteronomistic history (with “impressionistic echoes” in Chronicles, e.g., 1 Chr 29:29) have not left their names or titles. Yet, these individuals highly valued the prophetic word and may be labelled prophetic historians. “These references allude to a style of intermediation in the form of history writing” (1997:29).

### **2.2.6 Summing Up So Far**

At this point, the typology is left off with a summation asserting that there is no simple correlation between particular role-labels and particular forms or styles of writing. One prophet may use diverse literary forms, while another may be envisioned as both a holy man and prophetic speaker. Any one prophet could fill a variety of roles (1997:29-30). Petersen’s typology of role-titles does not appear again in his paper, although he does employ again the literary typology.

## **2.3 *Prejudgments***

Petersen contends that the implications of his study are far-reaching and “should affect significantly the ways in which we think about prophetic literature.” Yet, he charges that the diversity of prophetic literature is not widely appreciated because of a number of strong prejudices that influence how scholars conceive of prophetic literature (1997:30). He continues by discussing a number of these.

### **2.3.1 Prophets as Speakers**

First, Petersen complains that some treat the prophets primarily as formal speakers, even when there are published arguments to demonstrate that they could be writers as well as speakers (pointing to Isa 8:16). A

corollary to this misconception is the view that the speaking prophets were attempting to motivate an audience to do something (i.e. repent), when, in fact, they could also be attempting to explain what was about to happen, or why certain events are inevitable, using “fixed messages”, as was the case at Mari and with Balaam at Deir ‘Alla (1997:30-31).

### 2.3.2 **Ipsissima Verba**

A second common prejudgment holds that prophetic literature preserves the actual words spoken or written by prophets. “Such a judgment will have (and often has had) the effect of presuming or arguing that a given prophetic oracle was, indeed, spoken by the prophet to whom it has been attributed” (1997:31). Petersen points out that this oversimplifies the relationship between the prophet and the literature. He observes that texts need not be written by the prophets themselves. They may be written by dictation, by schools of disciples or by a later redactor. For instance, the divinatory chronicle and the legend typically cast the prophet in the third person and so the prophet should not be regarded as the author. The cases of the seer and the speaker types are different. In these, there is a scholarly desire to link the recorded words to the prophetic figure.

In either case, the term “prophetic” depends upon the presumption that the text provides an eye-witness to, or preserves the words of, the prophet. The use of the term “prophetic” involves, essentially, an historical judgment (1997:31).

This presumption often leads to the rejection of the views that some portions of a text may be the product of later writers or redactors. Petersen then links this trend with the increasing interest in a final form or canonical criticism, while cautioning that diachronic issues cannot be assumed away. He adds that questions about the formation of this literature remain foundational (1997:32).

### 2.3.3 **Poets**

Petersen’s third point of contention is the attitude of some that prophets were primarily poets, and so prophetic literature is poetry, citing in particular Abraham Heschel (1962:147-48) and David Noel Freedman (1977:21-23). He makes a good point in briefly reviewing arguments that the rhetorical function of prose in

prophetic literature needs to be taken seriously (1997:32-33). Following Robert Alter (1985:137-39), he observes that prophetic prose is not a chronological devolution, but a conscious literary and rhetorical strategy. Petersen reminds his reader that four of the five fundamental forms of prophetic literature are prose. “To argue that prophetic literature is essentially poetry is to ignore constitutive elements of prophetic behavior and literature attested in the Hebrew Bible” (1997:33).

### **2.3.4 One Message**

Petersen then criticizes at relative length the claims of many that there is a single, basic prophetic message concerning morality. He points to the wide diversity of conviction on many issues in different prophetic texts and that the prophetic legends (e.g., of Elisha), or the divinatory chronicles do not present a moral message at all. He also points out that it is hard to link the revolutionary prophets with an ancient ethos which they may have been calling the people to recover. The disagreement between prophets is not reducible to a conflict between ‘true’ and ‘false’ prophets. Even those Petersen considers true prophets seem to have disagreed (e.g., Ezekiel and Zechariah offer different visionary programs) (1997:33-34).

## ***2.4 Petersen’s Conclusions***

The critique of the academic prejudgments is closed by noting how one is now able to view prophetic literature in new ways. It encompasses both prose and poetry. The diversity of literary styles does to some extent reflect the diversity in role of Israel’s prophets. These prophets might compose their own works as speakers or writers. On the other hand, prophetic literature may have been written by people other than prophets, while prophets could fulfil their roles without writing anything. Given the diverse social and temporal contexts of prophetic activity, as well as the diverse forms of intermediation, reduction to a single prophetic message is not warranted (1997:35).

Petersen concludes the paper by noting that careful reconceptualization is required to address prophetic literature in all its forms, which include divinatory chronicle, vision report, prophetic utterance, divine oracle, legend, and prophetic historiography. He reaffirms that this diversity reveals the diversity of intermediation in ancient Israel. He denies that his typology is reductionism on his part. He ends his paper with this:

Much of the literature associated with prophets is noteworthy, both as prose and as poetry. In addition, attention both to social dynamics and to literary features helps us avoid a view of the prophet as spirit-filled poet, ethical teacher, or preacher of repentance. The challenge for future comprehensive studies of prophetic literature will be that of enabling various critical perspectives to interact in mutually informative dialogue (1997:35).

### *3 Critique*

#### *3.1 The Neglected Stew*

As I intimated at the outset, I whole-heartedly agree with the final sentence in the quote immediately above, but it is difficult to imagine what sort of dialogue Petersen proposes. One can but wonder exactly who Petersen considers uninformed, and what body of work Petersen himself has not read. More importantly, he implies that there are approaches of which his own readership is better off unaware! He offers his typology to help answer which approaches are appropriate to the study of the literature and those responsible for it (1997:23-24), but he does not then answer his own question. The various “higher critical perspectives” he employs, or implies are acceptable, are not differentiated from the ones used by the scholars whom he accuses of holding many of the prejudgments that he critiques (outside of this stand the final-form and canonical critics, cf. p. 32). The form-criticism advertised as illuminating the question of the appropriate methods cannot really be the solution itself.

Certainly one could not expect Petersen in the space of a single paper to address all the issues and the great diversity of methods and approaches now practised in biblical studies. I do not attempt such here myself. Yet, it is odd that someone calling for a new inter-disciplinary dialogue should attempt to limit the debate by dismissing the academic qualities of those whose work purportedly constitutes unwelcome lumps in the “methodological stew” (1997:23, and n. 1). Many of the ingredients in the admittedly eclectic pot, however, do constitute serious contributions to the study of prophetic literature. Indeed, they address many important issues ignored or mishandled in Petersen’s own relatively thin broth. Most significantly, Petersen shies away from the question of how one is to know that the literature actually contains information about the social roles of the prophets. Like many scholars, he treats the biblical text not as a portrait of Israelite history, its



heroes and villains, its God and its enemies. Rather, it is an open door to the world of ancient Israel itself. Petersen too hastily regards the image of prophets in the literature as data about prophets themselves, and not as a portrait or collage produced by others with their own social worlds to deal with. Petersen's analysis would be more helpful to the study of ancient Israel if he was dealing with primary sources (i.e., contemporary) instead of secondary ones (Lemche, 1998:22-30). Many other scholars, however, offer a more sophisticated approach.

## 3.2 *Typology*

### 3.2.1 *Roles*

At the heart of *The Roles of Israel's Prophets* that informs his 1997 study is Petersen's critique of previous research that concentrated on the prophetic charisma or office. Petersen posits role-theory as a development of the work on the prophetic office to explain how the prophets behaved in standardised ways, and yet still evidenced a great diversity in their actions. He addresses role enactment, observable behaviour in a social setting. A person may have several roles and enact each with a varying degree of involvement, and the biblical evidence suggests that the Israelite prophets are no exception (1981:7-33). Petersen is very close to contradicting himself when he asserts that the five-fold typology of divinatory chronicle, vision report, prophetic speech, legend, and prophetic history does not equate to a simple correlation between prophets known by a particular label and a particular form of literature (1997:29-30). This point cannot be gainsaid, but one can wonder why, at the outset, he was so careful to associate particular intermediary types with particular literary forms at all (1997:24). This seems to go beyond the positing of provisional ideal types that lead the researcher back to the data.<sup>3</sup>

To maintain that at some time there was a relatively clear distinction in terms and practice among the diverse prophetic figures Petersen must cut through the multiple layers of composition and editing in the Hebrew Bible. It is not readily apparent, however, that once the oldest layers are reached, one has texts related to the same points in time, or ones that reflect a universal understanding of terminology. This is an assumption on Petersen's part that is unjustified. Petersen attempts no defence of it. Moreover, it should be pointed out that

Petersen has not dealt with all the prophetic role labels in the Hebrew Bible. A much more comprehensive review can be found in Blenkinsopp (1995:123-29). This includes: קסם קסמיִם practitioner of divination; מוֹעֵן soothsayer; מִנְחֵשׁ augerer; מְכַשֵּׁף sorcerer; חֹבֵר חֹבֵר caster of spells, wizard; שׂוֹאֵל אוֹב one who consults ghosts; יִדְעֵנִי medium; and finally, the one who consults the dead, necromancer הַמְתִּים הַמְתִּים. It is true that Petersen has only attended to those that he thinks either authored the literature now found in the Hebrew Bible, or were the heroes of such literature written by other parties. Yet, one may legitimately ask Petersen why only certain kinds of prophets appear as speakers or main characters in those writings. Polemics in the Hebrew Bible against the activities of these other prophetic types suggest that a selection was made, and that only certain kinds of prophetic behaviour were deemed legitimate by the redactors and collectors. We cannot know what was not included, and so, even if the extant material does go back to the ‘historical’ prophets, we cannot assume that this material is giving us the full or accurate picture of prophetic behaviour.

### 3.2.2 General Terms

One peculiarity of Petersen’s study of the רֹאֵה־נֶבִיא seer is that most of the examples provided involve figures who are not described as seers in the texts in question (cf. Num 22:7; Jer 38:14-28; Ezek 20:1-3; Zechariah 7-8), a situation that undermines his initial premise that one type of prophetic behaviour will be represented predominantly by one kind of literature (1997:24). One could also refer to the consultation of the prophetess נְבִיאָה Huldah in 2 Kgs 22:12-20/2 Chr.34:20-28. Most troublesome is the single example of a seer consultation. Petersen gives no reason for emphasizing exclusively Samuel’s role as a consultant in this story, as opposed to his rather priest-like role in the offering of sacrifice (cf. 1 Sam. 9:11-14).<sup>4</sup>

In 1 Sam. 9:6-9, the one to be consulted is variously described as a man of God אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים (vv. 6-8), and as prophet נְבִיאָה, a title that the biblical narrator then describes as the modern term for a רֹאֵה־נֶבִיא, seer (v. 9).

Later, the man is again the man of God (vs. 10) and the seer (v. 11). Petersen’s solution is found in his earlier, 1981, work. There he claims that “man of God” was introduced in the text to replace seer as a more general, introductory term when the original folk tale was taken up by the redactor (1981:38-39). Dependent as this

analysis is on proposals of editorial addition and emendation that introduce at the primary stage of investigation a certain possibility of error, this example does not constitute the firm evidence Petersen would require. Moreover, his analysis only begs the question of what נִבִּי prophet meant to the person who added v. 9. One must also ask Petersen how man of God as a general term compares with the ideal type of the legendary men of God, Elijah and Elisha. For his part, Blenkinsopp observes that this title too was decontextualized, eventually becoming a title for great personalities of the past such as Moses (Deut. 33:1), and David (Neh. 12:24, 36) (1995:125-26). 1 Samuel 9 hardly provides a good place to start delineating roles and titles.

### 3.2.3 Unclear Visions

Even though many biblical prophetic books do employ the noun רֵאָוִי seer/visionary (e.g., Amos 7:12), and the verbal form of רֵאָוִי is sometimes employed to describe how the prophet received the contents of the books (e.g., Isa 1:1), I see no evidence to regard the רֵאָוִי seer/visionary label as pointing to a specific social role reflected in a particular literary type. The “*prima facie*” grounds Petersen finds for thinking that literature narrating visions may be associated with seers/visionaries is not provided by 2 Sam. 24:11. This verse does give evidence that רֵאָוִי was a title for some intermediaries, (Gad is David’s רֵאָוִי), but Petersen fails to observe that the verse does not tell of a vision (Petersen 1997:26-27). Gad is also called a prophet נִבִּי in this place (and cf. 1 Sam. 22:5). Moreover, in Amos 7:12, Amaziah calls Amos a visionary but bans him from prophesying (verb root נִבֵּא, vv. 12, 13), not from having visions. Amos himself responds that he is no prophet (נִבִּי v. 14), but that he has been ordered to prophesy (verb root נִבֵּא, v. 15). William Schniedewind points out that in some other places the title רֵאָוִי is also used in parallel with other terms (e.g., Mic 3:7; 2 Kgs 17:13; Isa 29:10; 30:10), and so any formal description of the role of this figure is difficult at best. Strikingly, the prophet נִבִּי Jehu in 1 Kgs 16:1, 7 is referred to as a visionary רֵאָוִי in e.g., 2 Chr 19:2 (although these are not synoptic texts). For his part, Schniedewind sees רֵאָוִי as referring to a prophet associated with the royal court, while in Chronicles, these figures are regarded as historians or annalists (1995:37-41). Schniedewind’s work illustrates how flexible the biblical evidence is. Blenkinsopp regards it

as difficult to distinguish between the visionary **חָזָן** and the seer **חֹסֵה** and indeed, the prophet **נְבִיא**, too, and asserts that in Chronicles **חָזָן** may have been chosen in preference to what was then the low-status term **נְבִיא** (1995:125). Moreover, Ehud Ben Zvi argues on the strength of verses such as Isa 2:1; 13:1 and Amos 1:1 (among others), in which the Qal form of the verb **חָזָן** has as its object words like **דְּבַר** or **מַשָּׂא**, that the verb need not point to visionary experiences at all. Thus, following Targum, **חָזָן** may simply mean prophecy and not vision (1996a:12-13).

Petersen admits that, at least on occasion (e.g. Jer 1:11-15), the vision reports could be “self-conscious rhetorical ploys” (1997:27). This allowance, however, undermines his “stronger” contention that the vision reports reflect the intermediary’s own social roles and not rhetorical choices. The stronger the contention, the stronger the evidence that is required. One needs proof that the books of Jeremiah, Amos et. al. report actual visions, and not simply Petersen’s assumption of historicity. Petersen allows no space to discuss the kinds of approaches that may be relied on to discriminate between authentic visions, rhetorical ploys or fictions by later writers. This extends itself to the other genres in his typology as well. Indeed, one might suppose that the methodological stew bubbles so enthusiastically partly because of dissatisfaction with the multifarious, and often mutually exclusive, compositional histories that scholars have produced en masse over the years.

### 3.2.4 Untitled Prophets?

Petersen’s final category, the untitled intermediary, is the most problematic of all. It is not at all clear to me how the Mari dreamers provide a useful comparison with prophetic historians who may have touched up the hypothetical DtrH (and other texts), by reference to the roles of Israelite prophets.<sup>5</sup> Petersen’s main examples of this kind of prophetic literature are in Kings, and he leaves open the question of whether the untitled intermediaries who made these references did so in the context of an initial ‘prophetic source’ or a later DtrP redaction. Of course, both are contentious proposals for the history of the book of Kings.<sup>6</sup> Neither does Petersen relate this category of intermediary to his previous category of prophetic legend, of which his prime exemplars are in the book of Kings as well. The legends of Elijah and Elisha are not considered authored by prophets themselves (cf. p. 31). Petersen does not discuss whether a text like Deuteronomy, that encompasses

so much legal material in a narrative framework starring the prophet par excellence, Moses, is an act of prophecy itself or is only prophetic because of its main character, if even then. It is not obvious to me why a historian may deserve the value laden term prophet, but a chronicler or tradent of legend may not; but it may have something to do with the status granted historians *in the modern world*.

I do not object to Petersen's very broad conception of prophetic literature, but he does not seem aware of the importance of critically analysing it. Petersen has affirmed that literature *about* prophets can be regarded as a kind of prophetic literature, alongside writings by or the recorded words of prophets themselves. Even though his typology does distinguish between literature by and about prophets, the differing methods of study relevant to the distinctions within this broad conception are not elaborated on at all, even though this is the task he sought to aid in accomplishing by proposing his typology in the first place (1997:23-24). One can imagine that historiography written in praise of a king or in expression of a religious or ethnic identity would have a radically different social setting and function than a review of history accorded prophetic status! Thus, different means of interpreting the two texts would be appropriate. With the fifth category, which is essentially prophets writing about prophets, however, the distinction gets muddled. He writes that certain texts reflect "a style of intermediation in the form of history writing" (1997:29). This only throws the onus on what is meant by intermediation, and how some kinds of writing *should not be regarded as intermediary*.

It is well known that eventually virtually all of the texts now comprising the Hebrew Bible were regarded as divinely inspired and prophetic (see especially Barton, 1986:96-140). The implication of this is, of course, that the term prophetic can extend not only to records of authentic prophetic actions and words (or those purporting to be such), or various stories about prophets, but also to a manner of *reading* particular texts *as if* they were divinely inspired, and hence prophetic. In Petersen's rethinking there is no place for recognising the distinction between what a scholar may label as prophetic and what an ancient reader might have, and that ancient perceptions may display great flexibility and change. This only highlights that Petersen should not have so quickly bypassed the question of what are "The Prophets" as a canonical group.

### 3.2.5 Arbitrary Moments

Petersen's typology is relatively static and undermines any real regard for the shifting portrayals of prophecy in the development of the literature and the changing social settings in which these developments took place, even if he does allow that נביא had eventually become a general term. Its static quality is imparted by Petersen's reliance on "moments in history" (unspecified) in which the four different prophetic titles corresponded more or less to different social roles, although one individual could occupy a number of them (1997:24). But can one include the untitled historians, who wrote retrospectively about ancient prophets, in these same moments, or are they from a different time? Petersen does not explain. Petersen's 1991 paper also trades a true diachronic analysis for a role typology, even if some allowance for historical change is granted.

One can wonder if the "moments in history" are not merely generated by the historical-critical enterprise itself that stresses the origins of things as more accessible, relevant and authentic. Indeed, in two earlier works, Petersen comments how the levitical singers in Chronicles were accorded prophetic status (1977:55-87; 1991:197). It is curious that this rather particular role has no place in the 1997 typology. One would suspect that Chronicles is portraying a second temple period reality, and therefore, is not old or authentic enough for Petersen's anti-historical rethinking. In my view, it is inappropriate to posit indefinable moments in history as an authentic time with which to begin study of the prophetic literature. Petersen has, in fact, started at the wrong end of the time line. The importance of diachronic issues is certainly not lost to him, but diachronics should not be merely a matter of charting changes in content and structure from original to extant text. Diachronic research must be informed by the awareness that our reconstructions of history are highly dependent upon the historical reconstructions *in those extant texts*. By analysing only apparently discrete shorter passages, Petersen has turned a blind eye to a typical prejudice of form-criticism, that the form and *Sitz im Leben* of composite texts, whole books, and indeed, collections of books may be safely ignored (Davies, 1992:39; Cooper, 1990:29).

### 3.3 *Prophets and Prejudgments*

Petersen's objections to the four prejudgments are fully justified when read simply as complaints that scholars use indefensible stereotypes of prophetic literature. Yet, I have a few quibbles about the implications of some of Petersen's reasoning, and a few more serious reservations.

#### 3.3.1 **Prophets' Words**

Petersen's complaint that prophets are too readily stereotyped as speakers is justified, superficially at least, on the grounds that the Hebrew Bible does contain references to prophets writing.<sup>7</sup> But then, Petersen's comment, "these prophets [נבִּיִּם וְנָאֻטִּים] were speakers" (1997:24) is a bit curious, especially since he attributes the majority of prophetic literature to the oracles stemming from this type of intermediary (1997:28). In any case, it can be objected, however, that the prophets as writers are as much a construct as any facet of ancient prophecy depicted in these texts.

Petersen is also justified in his second complaint that scholars are frequently too hasty in finding the authentic prophetic words in the literature. Yet, he asserts without demonstration that authentic vision reports are recorded in the Hebrew Bible (1997:27, 31). I suspect that most scholars would agree that prophets are not the authors of divinatory chronicles and legends (1997:31). But his complaint confuses the broad category of prophetic literature, with a question of a more restricted nature, i.e., how much of the Hebrew Bible's literature is to be attributed to prophets themselves? A glaring example of this confusion will be illustrated below. I skip ahead now to his fourth complaint.

#### 3.3.2 **Reduction and Attribution**

Petersen gives a number of valid reasons why it is not practical to think that all prophetic literature can be reduced to a basic prophetic message. In my opinion this is the most agreeable part of the paper. One must recognize the great diversity of theme and thought in the prophets and, indeed, of the whole Hebrew Bible. Yet, I have a few reservations. The defensible conclusion that there was no single ancient ethos to which the historicized biblical prophets were demanding conformity must still be put into the perspective of the ancient ethos of Yhwh's *Torah* and covenant with Israel, the exodus, and exile that the portrayal of prophecy in the

(now) biblical texts served. The development of traditions of long dead prophets, who warned Israel and predicted the tragic outcome of their apostasy, itself becomes part of the ancient ethos that informed the Persian and Hellenistic readers of our texts who Israel actually was and what was expected of it in the future. Diversity was subsumed under a level of enforced orthodoxy.<sup>8</sup>

It is unwise to treat prophecy in the monarchic period according to the biblical assertions of true and false prophets. The evaluations of true vs. false, legitimate representatives of God vs. charlatans, are relative judgments and are features in the religious world views of those who portrayed them as such. The language of attribution is a topic of research, not a resource. Moreover, in the Hebrew Bible, this language of attribution comes in lengthy discourses; a literature of attribution that includes historiographic material.<sup>9</sup> Petersen's accent on historicized biblical prophets has turned his attention away from explaining the attributive nature of prophetic literature itself. Therefore, scholars should take Petersen's views on the diversity of the prophetic message seriously, yet, it is also advisable to attend to the historical factors that led to the collections now comprising the Jewish and Christian canons. Of course, we do not have access to oral interpretations, suppressed written interpretations, or previously significant texts that eventually were no longer transmitted!

### **3.3.3 Poetry and Prophecy: Conflicting Definitions**

I now backtrack to Petersen's treatment of poetry. Petersen is right to emphasise that although there is considerable poetry in the prophetic corpus, it is necessary to recognize the importance of the mix of prose and poetry, citing Robert Alter (1985:137-39) in support. The problem of differing definitions, that I noted above, seems to lie behind Petersen's objection to Abraham Heschel, who is quoted as asserting that prophets may be thought of as poets (1962, quoted in Petersen, 1997:32).<sup>10</sup> Heschel is not addressing prophetic literature composed by scribes etc., about prophets (legends, et al.) but words he believes were actually spoken by prophets themselves in the execution of their mission. So too with Freedman (1977), who Petersen quotes as saying, "poetry and prophecy in the biblical tradition share so many of the same features and overlap to such an extent that one cannot be understood except in terms of the other ... the correlation



between poetry and prophecy. ... Poetry was the central medium of prophecy” (Freedman, 1977:21-23, ellipses as quoted in Petersen, 1997:32).

In his book of 1981, Petersen also quotes Freedman, beginning with the statement that opens his 1997 quote, but continuing on directly (with no ellipses to phrases in following pages). It is worth reproducing as quoted.

Poetry and prophecy in the biblical tradition share so many of the same features and overlap to such an extent that one cannot be understood except in terms of the other; in short, they are different aspects or categories of the same basic phenomenon, viz., the personal contact between God and man, and the verbal expression of it through the action of the Holy Spirit. The argument is essentially that the prophets were inheritors of the great poetic tradition of Israel’s adventure in faith and maintained, enhanced, renewed, and recreated it in the face of increasingly bitter opposition of those who preferred their religion in more manageable prose forms and who conceded (grudgingly) only the realms of liturgy (hymnody) and wisdom (gnomic and spiritual verse) to the poets.

(Freedman, 1977:21, quoted in Petersen, 1981:91).

Freedman seems not to be talking about prophetic literature broadly conceived, but the poetic compositions of prophets themselves. Moreover, Petersen *himself* immediately follows the above quote with his own assertion: “To be a prophet was to be a poet, though not in an automatic way” (Petersen, 1981:91).

Robert Alter’s observation on the amount of prose in prophetic literature does not really lend the desired support (cf. Petersen, 1997:33). Alter observes that oracular visions (e.g. Jer 1:13-19) are an example of prophetic prose. His example, however, like Jer 36:27-31, involves a direct conversation between God and the prophet, not God to the people through the medium of the prophet. In Jeremiah 36, Alter believes that the intricacies of the plot may have prevented composition in poetry (Alter, 1985:138-39). This, of course, may be true. While in this chapter there is a story of the prophet having some material written to be read before the people, only a small portion of the content of the second scroll is presented to the reader, so it is not known whether the original revelatory message was in verse or not. Moreover, one cannot prove that the *story itself* was necessarily written by a prophet! Petersen’s lack of attention to this point goes against his own observation that prophetic literature may contain much that is not the writings (or recorded sayings) of

actual prophets. Above all, it is improper to criticise analyses based on a relatively restricted notion of prophetic literature on ground of the counter-examples that can be adduced from a much wider understanding of what constitutes prophetic literature!

## **4 Paradigms**

At the heart of my disagreement with Petersen is the fact that we are dealing with fundamentally different approaches to the literature. I have complained above of his ‘open door’ approach to these writings, trading study of the literature for a too hasty rush to study prophets.

### **4.1 Social Sciences: A New Paradigm?**

Ferdinand Deist in his 1989 paper (and reprinted in 1995, the version used in the present paper) concluded that there is evidence of a paradigm shift in prophetic studies. He observes that within the dominant historical model questions were eventually asked that raised the issue of what a prophet actually was and the social factors that influenced them and society as a whole. More troubling is that these questions could no longer be answered. The dominant model cannot, according to Deist, solve these issues since it does not study prophecy or texts from the side of social realities. Even its notion of a text’s *Sitz im Leben* is too narrow (Deist, 1995:592-93). Deist maintains that the strategy to answer these questions is provided by the new archaeology, as well as sociological and anthropological analysis. This does not imply that historical-critical exegesis is being abandoned, although the results of the new studies may differ from the old. It is easy to see how Petersen’s work can be viewed as part of this paradigm shift, and to further this change in scholarship was perhaps his unspecified intent.

Robert P. Gordon also attends to the issue of paradigm shifts in biblical scholarship (cf. 1995a, b). He expresses surprise that Deist consigns the “text immanent” approaches, which bypass historical issues, to the old paradigm, while stressing that the new is represented by the anthropological and sociological approaches (1995b:601, cf. Deist, 1995:593-94). Gordon still sees a paradigm shift, but includes the ahistorical literary approaches in the new “text-extrinsic” paradigm, and the social-scientific approaches remain with the old one. He draws the line between the use or rejection of the Hebrew Bible as a source of historical information.

Yet, he agrees that the older paradigm can only be partially eclipsed (Gordon, 1995b:601-602). I do agree with Gordon that the anthropological studies represented by Petersen, Wilson, and Overholt (among others) should be included in the standard historical paradigm. They have altered significantly the predominant historical-critical paradigm, but it hardly offers the radical reappraisal in thought that Deist maintains it does. For one thing, it does not really question the *existence* of the prophetic characters as historical prophets, or the Hebrew Bible as an historical source for the monarchic period. This, however, does not relegate the social sciences to the realm of the obsolete, by any stretch of the imagination. Indeed, they are, in fact, totally neutral to the issue. It is only *how* their insights and theories are applied that render them state of the art, obsolete, or cutting-edge.

## ***4.2 Multiple Paradigms***

I doubt whether the methodological stew can be accurately described with a two-paradigm model of old and new. Rather it is, and has been for a long time, a question of multiple paradigms by which a scholar may define and delineate a programme of research. Thus, a programme is not in or under only one paradigm, but may be located conceptually by reference to more than one.

The first point one should identify is the most ancient, the theological paradigm that seeks religious truths, and employs religious beliefs as criteria to judge new insights. The second is what I would call the biblical Israel, or perhaps 'survival' paradigm. This is the very diverse but familiar historical-critical enterprise, that employs the Hebrew Bible as a (generally) reliable historical source, and presumes that it contains texts that have been in continuously transmission for centuries before the text reached anything approaching its familiar form. Interest is on the intents of the original authors and succeeding editors. In this category I would place many of the results of anthropological research, as they, in general, remain linked to many of the categories and concepts familiar to historical critics. A third is what I will call the literary paradigm that is represented by many final form studies. In this area, one finds meaning as a product of a reader's interaction with the text. Theories known from the study of other literature are the primary tools of the close readings that are practised. The fourth, like the second, is interested in the historical context of the biblical writings. I will label it the construction of biblical Israel or constructionist paradigm since it understands the history of

Israel and, indeed, the notion of Israel itself as related in the Hebrew Bible, to be a construct of a heritage by (post-monarchic) scribes and thinkers. One of its central premises is that the Hebrew Bible is not a reliable source of information about the times and events it describes. The work of Ben Zvi, Davies and Lemche and my own work are certainly oriented toward this paradigm.

Each particular scholar must determine how much he or she is to be influenced by each of these perspectives. Overlap and shared methods between these four paradigms are to be expected as much as are sharp polemics. Certainly, theological concerns may often influence historical or literary minded scholars. Moreover, both historically oriented schools may introduce literary theories more familiar to ahistorical studies. Whereas the literary appreciation of the texts will continue as long as they are read, with or without impact or influence from the other three, and the theological enterprise is probably even more secure, the real battle of methods is between the second and the fourth, the two overtly historical perspectives. One might, however, place some studies as transitionally between them (e.g., Barton, 1986). The two historical approaches are, on many levels, quite exclusive. The critique of Petersen undertaken here, of course, is firmly rooted in the fourth alternative and may be read as an apologia for it, although it does have some recognition of the third. As I have stated already, I regard Petersen himself as much closer to the second. Historians of the rival perspectives, however, share a common interest in many other disciplines; e.g., text-criticism loses none of its significance under the new historical agenda. Moreover, the constructionist positions do not presuppose that the texts are compositional unities, although they may well be less confident that compositional and editorial histories could be determined with precision. Neither would such scholars be opposed to writing histories of monarchic Judah and Israel (or earlier times in the region's history), although they would stress archaeology and inscriptions as primary sources, and relegate the Hebrew Bible to a secondary status, if they regard it at all suitable for such efforts. Moreover, both schools of thought may appeal to comparative evidence and other social scientific methods and insights in equal measure.

## 5 Rethinking Prophecy Again

I will spend the rest of this paper elaborating on the promise of the constructionist approach as opposed to the dominant historical paradigm. It will require expanding the critique beyond Petersen's 1997 paper to some of his other works, and I will introduce the thought of other scholars.

### 5.1 *No Comparison?*

The role theory used by Petersen (to which I will return below) is only one part of the social-scientific approach. Another is cross-cultural comparison of different societies and their prophets. The comparisons are usually not at the level of comparing finished prophetic texts, but are concerned with the prophetic phenomenon itself. For comparative material scholars often point to the Mari prophetic texts and to neo-Assyrian texts and other ancient Near Eastern cultures (see note 5 for bibliography). Others go much further afield in finding comparative material. The two main contributors are Thomas W. Overholt (1986, 1990), and Wilson (1980), who offer a broad range of comparative data for the study of prophecy.

#### 5.1.1 **Handsome Lake**

One contribution to the comparative approach is Overholt's well-known 1982 contribution to *Semeia*, that is complemented in his book of 1986 (pp. 101-22, 321-31). He uses as primary examples the biblical Jeremiah and Handsome Lake, a Seneca Indian of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Overholt notes how different prophets related to their unique situations with a diversity of messages, their activities conform to a general pattern based on the prophet's relationship with both the divine and the society. Feedback from the people is as important as the revelation for the social process of prophecy, in what he labels a proclamation-feedback-proclamation sequence. Still, he emphasises the prophetic process over the content of the individual's proclamation as the more useful for comparative studies. Yet, this process "has its locus in a specific situation" (1982:69).

### 5.1.2 Problems with Patterns

Beyond the difficulty of identifying the authentic materials and their specific situations in all material to be compared, is the problem that often the knowledge of the prophetic *process* must come from the same highly edited literary texts as the *content* of revelation. This is especially so in the case of the Hebrew Bible. If there are more or less universal patterns of prophetic behaviour behind the great cultural and situational differences, comparative analysis is absolutely useless to reconstructions of the ‘historical’ biblical prophets. The biblical text need not represent an old manifestation of the ubiquitous features of prophecy. The model upon which the texts were based could have come from any time. If the comparative material itself determines what we find, we would have nothing but a circular argument or something so general as to be completely useless. The problem is not with finding general patterns, but accurate details about real people and real events. This is a problem the comparative model cannot solve, for the Hebrew Bible, or for any other culture known largely from the texts under scrutiny themselves. For instance, judging by Overholt’s own description of the *Gaiwio*, the recorded teachings of Handsome Lake, analysis is required that would include the full range of disciplines that the Hebrew Bible is subject to, including textual, redactional, and source criticism (1986:321-31). Perhaps the situation here is less complex than that of Jeremiah, but there is a certain margin of error in any case. Above all, the *Gaiwio* is itself a ‘construct’ of what the prophet’s life meant for later generations.

### 5.1.3 Decontextualization

Overholt has attended to the issue of verisimilitude in a 1990 paper, but his arguments appear weak to me. He contests Graeme Auld’s position (e.g., 1996 [1983], 1984) that the biblical ‘prophets’ were, in fact, ‘poets’ who criticised prophecy, and Robert Carroll’s view (e.g. 1996 [1983], 1988, 1989) that the prophetic characters in the Hebrew Bible are fictitious. Overholt finds it reasonable to assume that the genre of texts like Jeremiah was that of anthology, and not fiction, and so one should not reject the editor’s description of the book as reflecting the activities of Jeremiah out of hand. But none of this really acknowledges the question of how one knows that the editor of the anthology employed material accurate enough to make a reconstruction of the historical Jeremiah practical. Ascription of genre cannot replace *proof* of historicity, and that is what is needed.

Philip. R. Davies holds that the more that is learned about intermediation from anthropology the less is understood about the Bible's prophetic literature. Conversely, the more the texts are examined, the less can be said about an individual intermediary. "Studying intermediation is not the way to investigate the books, nor is literary analysis of the books the way to understand social intermediation" (Davies, 1996:49). Robert Carroll observes how the writing and editing of the prophetic utterances into the prophetic collections represents a "double decontextualization" which stands in the way of using the biblical texts as "prima facie evidence for the social location of prophecy" (1989:208). Comparative studies of prophetic phenomenon does not allow one to step through the door of the Hebrew Bible to the religious world of monarchic or early post-monarchic Judah and Israel. It is not that there were no prophets in this time, but merely that scholarship has yet to penetrate the biblical portrait (collage?) of this phenomenon with enough clarity. Comparative studies of the social role of such images may still prove to be enlightening if the historical and social contexts of the images in question could be isolated. This is certainly difficult, but it may be easier than trying to access the prophets themselves. Yet, this opportunity is not taken by Overholt in his comparative study in any comprehensive way (although see 1986:309-31, on the "Sociology of Story Telling", for some superficial recognition of the issue).

## ***5.2 A Portrait of Ancient Prophecy ?***

### **5.2.1 Prophetic Age**

Whether prophecy was thought to have ended in the Persian and later periods, evolved into exegesis (Sommer, 1996), or continued in new forms (Cohen, 1985, Overholt, 1988) is a matter of some debate. Petersen, for his part, merely emphasises different audiences and social realities in which prophecy operated (1991). My purpose here is not to settle this debate, but merely to call attention to its importance. One study well aware of its importance (and that appears in Petersen's bibliography, but not his article proper) is John Barton's *Oracles of God* (1986). At its close, Barton expresses confidence that after the true difficulty of the task is acknowledged, something may well be learned of the ancient prophets. But first the scholar must penetrate the self-portrait of the later Jewish thinkers who thought they were seeing the prophets of old, but were only seeing themselves (1986:273). Scholars may differ in how easy this penetration is, but Barton's

recognition of the need for it before one can access Amos et. al. is to be lauded.<sup>11</sup> Most significant, however, is Barton's demonstration of the second temple period belief in the 'Prophetic Age' in which the truly great prophets had lived (1986:115-16).

### 5.2.2 Future and Past Prophets

Naomi G. Cohen has traced the models on which pseudepigraphical apocalyptic literature is based to the later biblical prophetic books. Because the belief in some form of continuing revelation persisted into the Rabbinic period, Cohen finds it difficult to attribute the rise of writing in the name of ancient figures to stem exclusively from a strategy of legitimisation. She dates Isa 42:19; 44:26; 63:9; 2 Chr 36:16; Hag 1:13; Mal 1:1; 2:7; 3:1 to just before, if not contemporary with, the advent of pseudepigraphic apocalyptic literature. Some of these texts imply that messenger and prophet were interchangeable, while others seem to indicate that messenger came to eclipse the concept of prophet as the latter was reinterpreted with an increasingly heavenly dimension (1985:17-21). She explains the pseudepigraphical nature of apocalyptic texts as stemming from the belief that the writer had become possessed by the ancient figure. Thus, the dictating angel is depicted as speaking to the ancient figure.

I will later turn to role-theory and believer's identification with characters from literature and tradition. More immediately relevant, however, is that Cohen finds the precursor for pseudepigraphical writing in the apparently late introduction of the notion of the messenger in the expanding prophetic corpus. Her assessment may well be accurate, but I would not rule out of hand that the later pseudepigraphy may only be carrying on an established practice that is potentially to be found in many places throughout the Former Prophets. Moreover, one should not resist the possibility that the kind of construction of the earlier prophetic age depicted in the Hebrew Bible was part of the same kind of anticipation of the coming messengers and the continuing debate about the status of new revelations.

One scholar who does attend to this is Edgar Conrad (1997), who maintains that in the Book of the Twelve (which he reads as a collage) a two-phase prophetic past is constructed with sections set in the Assyrian and in the Persian periods. The Assyrian section corresponds to Hosea through Zephaniah, and the Persian section is Haggai through Malachi. In the Assyrian part of the book of the twelve, only Habakkuk is



identified as a (or the) prophet, מַלְאָכִים (Hab 1:1; 3:1), and only Hos. 12:5 refers to a messenger מַלְאָךְ (who spoke to Jacob at Bethel). In the latter portion, Haggai (e.g., 1:1, 3) and Zechariah (1:1, 7) are labelled prophets. Moreover, in this Persian section, the appearance and words of messengers/angels מַלְאָכִים is described (cf. Zech. 1:9, 11, 12, 13; 2:3; 3:1). Haggai is called such a messenger (Hag. 1:13), and there is, of course, the problem of the name Malachi or title “my messenger” in Mal 1:1, and the other uses of the term in this book (Mal 2:7-8; 3:1-2). Conrad sees the Book of the Twelve as developing the notion of who is a prophet, finally settling the issue in Zechariah in which the former prophets מַלְאָכִים הַנְּבִיאִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים (1:4; cf. 7:7, 12) are described. Conrad links the assertion that prophecy has disappeared with the belief in the rise of the messenger. Conrad also suggests that a similar breakdown between Assyrian and Persian sections of Isaiah (1-39 and 40-55) is possible. In both books, the prophetic, Assyrian past can only be viewed from the later, Persian period. Prophets disappear and new figures arise, the messenger in the Minor Prophets and the servant in Isaiah. Auld also points to evidence that at least some components of the Book of the Twelve had been edited by those assimilating earlier texts to an apocalyptic vision, his primary example being Amos 3:7 (Auld, 1991). Earlier, he also suggested something of the difficulty in reconstructing the social roles of the actual poets

If that poetic succession from Amos to Jeremiah was later re-presented as a series of ‘servants’ duly acknowledged by God then this is in part a judgment that they had in fact been good advocates. It tells us how their authority for a later scriptural age was understood; but leaves unstated how they functioned in their own age (Auld, 1988:250).

The question of the relative autonomy of the components of the Book of the Twelve, however, remains an important question. Conrad (1997) regards the book as a collage, while Ben Zvi (1996b) argues that its components were originally treated as individual texts. One can conclude, however, that even if the servant and messenger are fictive or symbolic characters, they were *believed* in some quarters to have a reality grounded in God’s dealings with his people: dealings articulated and foreshadowed in the words and deeds of the prophets of old. The portrait of these ancient prophets, therefore, is attuned not so much to the past, but to the future.

### 5.2.3 Backtracking: Petersen on Late Israelite Prophecy

Petersen's 1977 monograph, *Late Israelite Prophecy*, anticipates some of the concerns raised above, even if it does not carry them through to their logical conclusion. Petersen addresses post-monarchic Israelite prophecy and finds a bifurcation between the view of history espoused by the Chronicler, and what is labelled the deuteroprophetic corpus. For his part, the Chronicler sought to portray the Levitical singers of the monarchic period as having the gift of prophecy, even though this portrayal was not historically accurate. The Chronicler's contemporary, second temple Levitical singers, preserved the capacity for prophecy (1977:45, 87). The producers of the deuteroprophetic literature regarded classical prophecy as a thing of the past and denied contemporary claims of prophecy. They did see a future return of prophecy that preceded the Day of Yhwh. Their own task as prophetic traditionists was not to be prophets, but to reflect on and interpret the prophetic texts for their own age. This included supplementing the earlier 'classical' texts with their own writings. Petersen concludes that these texts do reveal a new concept of prophecy (1997:19). With this in mind, it is curious that Petersen makes no allowance for the portrayal of early prophecy as part of the over-all conception of prophecy in his 1997 paper, nor in the one of 1991 that includes a section on "Constructing the Notion of Israelite Prophecy" (pp. 191-93). This discussion is restricted not to the notion of prophecy but to defining prophets according to social role. This is curious since the paper itself deals primarily with the second temple period. No hint of changing notions of prophecy are to be found in his 1997 "rethinking". One may be led to the conclusion that Petersen's thought now is rather less sophisticated than that displayed in his book of more than twenty years ago!

### 5.2.4 'Classic' Problems

In both his 1977 and 1991 works Petersen employs the notion of classical prophecy, that purportedly emerged in the eighth century BCE. Such a concept, however, is problematic, if almost ubiquitous in biblical scholarship (e.g., Wolff, 1987). It is anachronistic, positing those characters in the biblical literature deemed valid or authentic by those who produced it as typical and normative of prophecy in the monarchic period. As noted above, Petersen does not even include the disparaged diviners etc. in his typology of Israelite prophecy: it seems that what is not 'true' according to the biblical writers is not Israelite. But this is part of the portrait

painted in the second temple period, not social reality in monarchic times. Again, one engages the literature of attribution, not anthropological or historical data.

If these prophets lived at all, they may have been special, out of the ordinary; and perhaps that is why they are remembered. Even if they were typical worshippers of Yhwh, this religion itself is juxtaposed in the tradition against a frequently apostate monarchy and a population plagued with numerous liars, charlatans, and other pretenders to the calling of Yahwistic prophecy. The faith in Yhwh that the ‘classical’ prophets upheld is remembered in the Hebrew Bible not as *what was* typical, but as *what should have been*. Thus, we cannot learn what prophecy was like for society as a whole in their time. It is fully conceivable that the image of heroes of old changed as religious thought developed. We do not know how much material was suppressed for ideological purposes, material that may give a radically different portrait of ancient prophecy. One can only wonder about how much prophetic literature from the monarchic period was simply not continuously transmitted because of accidents befalling rare scrolls or even the lack of resources to re-copy all decaying manuscripts. The ‘classical prophets’ are known only because some texts were selected as some society’s ‘classics’. We cannot read what the collectors did not want to read themselves! ‘Classical’ or canonical prophetic texts do not readily translate into the scholarly conception of the historical ‘classical’ prophets whose lives are open to scrutiny, making monarchic-era prophecy a known quantity.

### 5.2.5 Prophetic Symbols

In the sense that the biblical prophets represent an ideal that was never realized, a failure that was believed to have influenced history in a dramatic fashion, the prophet can be seen as a symbol. Robert Gordon, who is himself interested in recovering data about the monarchic prophets, undermines his own goals when he suggests something along these lines himself:

When readers ancient or modern have thought to detect a prophetic element in the “suffering servant” of the (so-called) Fourth Servant Song of Isaiah 52:13-53:12, whether they have thought of the prophet of the “Song” or Moses or Jeremiah, this is possible because prophecy (Israelite style) has developed to the point where a prophet himself may become a symbol—one might almost say “type”—of God’s ultimate engagement with the world (Gordon, 1995a:6).

But, if the prophets may be types or symbols, when did this come about? Solely at the level of reading the prophetic corpus, or, as I believe, at the level of composition, collecting and editing? The whole complex of the prophet and prophecy in the Hebrew Bible may be the construction of symbols evoking diverse emotional, religious, and intellectual reactions. The past is constructed for the sake of the future. Prophets, who reveal the will and intent of God, as proven by the historical tradition itself, cannot be exempted from this.<sup>12</sup>

### 5.3 *Scribes and Brokers*

In a recent book, which post-dates Petersen's article, Davies maintains that the collections of prophetic oracles would have been developed from archives into literary texts, embellished by the scribes, and used in continuing political dialogue. New literary prophecies may well have been forthcoming in the Persian period and later, and these in turn may have "inspired a great deal of literary 'prophesying' on the part of the scribal establishment. Were prophetic oracles part of the scribal curriculum?" (Davies 1998:116). Davies (1996) and Ehud Ben Zvi (1996b, 1997) have placed emphasis on the study of the intersection between the producers of the (post-monarchic) prophetic scrolls and their audience. Davies maintains it is plausible that the prophetic texts were based on archived oracles and other documents from the monarchic period (as the Mari parallels suggest). These were eventually organised and classified. Interest in them led to their ordering and supplementation and collection into scrolls. He allows that it is possible that these oracles were assigned to individual prophets at the level of initial archiving, but this needs to be demonstrated, it cannot be assumed (1992:111-12). Ben Zvi writes:

Communication of a text-based theology grounded on the divine authority of the written word (a common claim in biblical literature) *required* by necessity the presence of those who could read these texts competently, so they could serve as brokers of the divine knowledge to the public (cf. Neh. 8). The more highly educated the readers of these texts were required to be, the more indispensable was the role of the literati themselves, that is, those who not only re-read this literature "day and night" (cf. Ps. 1.2; Josh. 1.8; Deut. 17.18-19) but also wrote it. (Ben Zvi, 1997:200)

The historical context of public interpretation of texts that also inspired new compositions is one factor that needs to be taken into account in the production of the prophetic literature that so intrigues modern biblical scholars. It cannot simply be assumed away in the desire to transform ‘classical’ prophets into historical ones, regardless of how many parallels are adduced. Guidelines (but not faultless descriptions) for what Israelite prophecy might have been like may be drawn from such a comparative enterprise. It must be remembered, however, that these parallels may have been subject to their own decontextualization through archiving and recording, and so they may not be unmediated attestations to prophetic activity either. Such parallels, however, are unlikely to provide firm evidence for how to study the highly evolved texts and their portraits of prophecy now found in the Hebrew Bible. Above all, the construction of the prophetic age, and all the creativity of cultural memory needs to be taken into account in addressing the prophetic corpus.

## ***5.4 Poetry Revisited***

### **5.4.1 Poetry, Prophecy and Historical Paradigms**

Petersen’s brief comments on poetry include no recognition of the complexity of the language arts that were employed by the people who composed the prophetic literature. This is totally inadequate to a programme of rethinking the literature in question. Petersen makes no reference to the well-known thesis of A. G. Auld that portrays the prophetic literature growing from a process of institutionalising earlier, radical poets who often wrote or spoke against prophets. Auld points to textual and redactional evidence which suggests that the term נָבִיא prophet was only secondarily applied to figures such as Jeremiah (Auld, 1996 [1983]). Auld has had his critics, but his supporters too.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Petersen regards Auld’s work among the “uninformed treatments” that he regards as better left alone; but, if so, this would actually say more about Petersen than Auld. Auld has contributed significantly to, if not begun a number of valuable discussions: about the construction of ‘ancient’ prophecy, the portrayal of true and false prophecy, its relationship to apocalyptic and, the ‘taming’ if you will, of radical literature into a canon of sacred writings. Moreover, Auld addresses the issue of the role of poetic expression in the delivery of divine revelation.

This last point cannot be downplayed. One must ask why poetry is so often chosen as the words of the prophet, or the prophet's recitation of the words of God. Prophecy and poetry need not be thought of as such polar opposites (cf. Geller, 1993). In the texts ostensibly recording the words of prophetic oracles, one would find a tremendous amount of poetry. It is well-known that the distinction between prose and poetry in biblical Hebrew is a debatable issue, although some delineation may well be made. What is needed in prophetic studies, perhaps, is not so much a firm distinction between the two, but rather a greater appreciation of the language arts employed in the prophetic corpus. In the vision reports, while the quoted words of Yahweh may well be prose, there are cases of word-plays. Famous are the puns made on the names of items Amos is to identify. The mysterious tin (or lead) object, the **תַּנְּנִיץ** becomes some portent of doom when God says he will place it in the midst of Israel (Amos 7:7-8).<sup>14</sup> In Amos 8:1-2, a basket of summer fruit **כַּלּוֹב קִיָּץ** becomes the end **קֵץ** of Israel. This brings them into the same sphere of creative and transformative use of language that poetry is based on.

#### 5.4.2 Genius And Contingency

To my mind, what is needed is not the simple recognition that the prophetic texts contain both poetry and prose. Also required are redoubled efforts toward understanding this body of literature both in terms of its aesthetics and historical contingency. Even though many literary theories are not particularly concerned with the author of a text *per se*, this very diverse body of research can provide useful tools for historical study. One has only to look at the narratological studies of Lyle Eslinger into the so-called DtrH, that radically reappraises the different character and narratorial intents behind the use of 'Dtr language', to see the potential impact of synchronic analysis into prophetic texts.<sup>15</sup> I am reminded of Davies' caution that all too often scholars try to give historical explanations for what are essentially literary problems. Davies finds the remedy to this in the wealth of new literary studies that probe the artistry of the texts in question (1992:29). Petersen makes no mention of the wealth of synchronic studies now available, other than to criticise in general terms the final-form approaches which assume too readily that the prophet wrote the entire book under scrutiny (1997:32); and so the insights of these literary researches will be lost to anyone who follows strictly the

rethinking Petersen advises. In the very least, synchronic study can treat the texts on many different levels other than that of a simple repository of information, testable for its veracity.

Roy F. Melugin writes that perhaps the very language of the biblical texts stands in the way of historical reconstruction. The pictures of reality in metaphorical or highly figurative texts are often fictive (1996:70-71). A little later he adds:

Poetic language creates its own world. Like a self-contained work of sculpture, poetic discourse seems to shape a world of its own which can be strikingly independent in its referential function (1996:71).

The poetry's "own world" problematizes the quest for the historical prophet, and makes the study of the aesthetics of this literature vital, even for historical criticism of either paradigm.

#### 5.4.3 Ethnopoetics

A collection of papers entitled *Poetry and Prophecy: The Anthropology of Inspiration* shows how mutually informative poetics and 'prophetics' are, especially since many non-Western traditions make explicit links between poetry and prophecy.<sup>16</sup> Of course, comparative studies can be criticised in general principle by calling attention to the diversity of cultural contexts. Yet, J. Leavitt is confident that recent anthropologists' work does attend to the particular and to the language of the gods in a way that lends itself to cross-cultural comparison and possible generalisations (Leavitt, 1997:32-33). These show how "ecstatic visionaries and visiting spirits twist and turn everyday language to provoke new and unexpected connections and reversals, sometimes of great cosmological or social import" (Leavitt, 1997:33-34). Certainly, there will be limitations as to what ethnopoetics could hope to achieve in the absence of firm data, but it may throw some light on the post-monarchic literati who produced our literature in its familiar form and their apparent liking for complex and multi-vocal literature that often embraces word-play and poetry.<sup>17</sup> The study of aesthetic features and psychological factors in the prophetic texts, then, should be considered important, even if direct comparison of phenomena with the literatures of other peoples remains a precarious business. Still, attention to developments in ethnopoetics may at least provide some useful heuristic tools to the biblical scholar in assessing the prophetic texts as both sociological and literary phenomena.

#### 5.4.4 “Enemies” of Biblical Poetry?

One study that I feel should almost be required reading for those interested in stirring the methodological stew is the 1980 work provocatively entitled, *Enemies of Poetry*. In this book, W. B. Stanford criticises the overly historicist and factualist approaches to poetry from the classical world. In no way does he recommend abandoning historically oriented research into Greek and Latin literature, but rather seeks to inform this research by a better appreciation of the openness and freedom of poetry, ancient or otherwise. Among poetry’s enemies are historicists who reduce poetry to history in fancy dress; an extreme form of whom are revisionists who rewrite poetry to fit a factualist agenda. He later advises that there is a difference between verisimilitude and verity. History, he says, is for poetry and not poetry for history (1980:8-10, 20). Further chapters are devoted to other “enemies”: scientists, who demand scientific accuracy in poetic descriptions of the world, moralists and politicians, who would demand coherence with their own sense of right and wrong; and philosophers. Mathematicians, however, are judged somewhat less harshly (1980:33-88). Many of his observations ring true even for biblical scholarship, but none as directly as those in the final section of the book. Here Stanford isolates “Twenty-six Fallacies of Classical Criticism”, and his discussion of them reads like a systematic critique of biblical historical-critical scholarship. I cannot treat them all here, and some readers may have a justifiable quibble with a number of them, but some are particularly salient to the present discussion.

##### 5.4.4.1 *Fallacies of Under-reading*

Many of the fallacies in Stanford’s list may be characterized as under-reading poetry, i.e., not discovering all of the poetic riches that there are. Perhaps modern readers, who cannot be native speakers of biblical Hebrew, may be inclined to over-read the text: but more likely is their under-reading it, since they lack the native speaker’s cultural familiarity with the language (Roberts, 1992:40). The “cosmetic fallacy” regards poetic language as a process of ornamentation, while modern poets and critics reject this view strongly (1980:97-99). Stanford denies that ideas and thoughts always come first, the rendering of them in poetry being a secondary stage (1980:98, and cf. Nystrand, 1986:28). This is, in fact, the essence of the response to Ziony Zevit (1990) by Francis Landy (1992). At issue is whether or not an ancient audience of the Song of Songs would have picked up on all the correspondences discoverable under Roman Jakobson’s poetics, and whether



poetic function should be denied to elements of the discourse that are semantically or syntactically inessential.

Related to the above is the “fallacy of always clearly intended meaning”(1980:114-16), that stems from methodological and precise scholars expecting artists to be the same. “Poets have confessed that they were not sure what phrases meant even after they had incorporated them in a poem” (1980:114). A consequence of this fallacy is that critics are often reluctant to accept that literature can be deliberately ambiguous (1980:115). In biblical scholarship this is also true, as apparent evidence of ambiguity or polysemy become problems to be solved, sometimes by emendation (Ben Zvi, 1996c:132-33; Roberts, 1992:39-48). One can point to all the efforts to interpret the enigmatic phrase לֹא־אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ (lit. “I will not cause it/him to return”) that occurs eight times in Amos 1:3-2:6. Many scholars affirm only one meaning for what the “it/him” might be, some claiming that Amos would not have been deliberately vague (Andersen and Freedman, 1989:234; Wood, 1993:43). Yet, others see a restricted ambiguity, with two options, although there is no consensus on *which* two.<sup>18</sup> I maintain, however, that the possibilities are far wider, encompassing well over a dozen possible meanings. The polysemy in the phrase is one of the most creative aspects of the book, not only in respect to the authors, but also for the readers, allowing exploration of the contrasting images of Yhwh as a punishing deity, and as one who will, in the end, relent and heed the prophet’s intercession, even after this was once ruled out.<sup>19</sup>

#### 5.4.4.2 *Fallacies of Original Meaning*

A number of other fallacies Stanford isolates highlight many aspects of how the Biblical Israel paradigm often mistakenly identifies redactional development and original meanings. I will leave it to my own readers, however, to provide their own specific examples. Two of these fallacies are mirror images of each other. The “once is typical fallacy” finds a rare linguistic feature to be characteristic of a particular author (Stanford 1980:129-31). Perhaps more common in biblical scholarship, however, is the “never only once fallacy” that ignores the fact that one of the primary marks of genius is the production of unique concepts and phrases. Stanford offers a quote that makes something of an ironic proverb of this error: “einmal heisst neimals und zweimal heisst immer” (Wiliamowitz-Moellendorff, 1921:40-41, quoted in Stanford, 1980:129).

Stanford also calls attention to the “intentional fallacy”, that says it is wrong to try to learn the writer’s intention on the basis of the writings alone. He advises that one must be careful about this. To restrict such questioning, however, is equally fallacious (1980:140-42). One could point to the “character-as-author fallacy” and the “fallacy of autopsy”, which is the assumption that vivid descriptions of places or persons imply that the author has direct personal knowledge of these things (1980:103-105, 136). A few others warrant only a brief mention in Stanford’s work. Of particular interest is the fallacy of irony, i.e., that whatever does not fit the interpreter’s theory actually means the opposite (1980:156), a caveat that should be taken to heart by all. Altogether, Stanford’s book offers any historical scholar considerable food for thought. While it provides considerable ammunition for the constructionist or literary critique of biblical historians, advocates of the newer historical paradigm should not think they will never be at the brunt of its attack.

More significantly for the present discussion is the “propaganda fallacy” (1980:155). This has implications in that poetry should not be taken as mere propaganda for political ends. This caveat is relevant not only to those who identify each layer of writing with one ideological group or another (e.g., the hypothetical Deuteronomists), but also to those who see the prophetic literature as part of the post-monarchic construction of ancient Israel, and in this group I include myself. Certainly poetry reflects in some ways the world view of its authors or editors, but literature (poetry or prose) need not always be the deliberate and contrived mouthpiece of political ambition. To think such is to suggest that poets cannot use their skills as a means of confronting paradox within their own thoughts, or between themselves and society as a whole.

#### **5.4.5 Poetic Worlds and Readerly Roles**

The relationship between authorial intent and reader-determined meanings is very complex. I have already quoted Melugin as asserting that poetry creates its “own world”. David J. A. Clines observes that the literary text generates “an alternative ‘world,’ another set of principles, values, relationships, and perceptions, which then confronts the reader. The result is a conflict between the two worlds, two ways of seeing things” (1995:167). Clines observes that the alternative world is understood not by objective interpretation, but by “entering” it. The alternative world may be only a perspective on the reader’s own world. Entering the alternative world, therefore, may influence how one reacts to the ‘real’ world outside of the text. Clines

comments, for the reader of poetry or parable “the text as language-event, world creating, and world-destroying, has the primacy over the interpreter” (Clines, 1995:168-69). The reader actively takes up one of the roles in the text and is hence “carried forward by a kind of inner logic of consequences which the chosen role brings with it” (Thistleton, 1970:441, quoted in Clines, 1995:169).

With literature thus conceived, the scholarly programme of interpretation (especially among historical critics) demands objectification of the text, but this stance should not be anachronistically applied to the ancient readers. An overtly literary approach may also produce obstacles to the kind of historical and anthropological routes to interpretation that Petersen favours. On the other hand, new historical or anthropological questions can be opened up. For instance, the readerly roles discussed briefly above can be related to the social role-theory advanced by Petersen, and developed into what may be a productive new approach to the prophetic literature.

### ***5.5 Role-Theory***

As I have intimated however, Petersen’s handling of the typology of roles is highly problematic. It is difficult to posit social roles on the basis of texts whose origins are so poorly known and, in any case, probably come from later times. These objections may also be levelled against others (in varying degrees) who try to reconstruct the diversity of Israel’s prophets from the Hebrew Bible. For instance, Bernhard Lang finds there to have been “corporative prophets”, “temple prophets” and “free prophets” (1983:94-98). Comparative study may provide some kind of general outline, but this is a poor substitute for actual data. Role-theory in the social sciences deserves some more attention, however, as it is not restricted to a method of determining someone’s position vis-à-vis all possible job-descriptions of prophets. Some variants deal more with psychological factors that influence how people perceive themselves in their own worlds over and against the worlds known to them from the texts and traditions that shape their reality. Thus, role-theory may perhaps further illuminate what has been said above about readerly role-taking.

### 5.5.1 Diversity

There is diversity of role theories. One is the “structural-analytical” model, that deals with the different roles in a social unit. Roles are seen as social quantities, a division of labour, and not something performed by specific individuals. The “interactionist” model studies the individual’s efforts towards interaction between two or more roles. (Holm, 1997:73-76). Petersen’s 1981 work may be considered to be in this second group, especially as it engages the question of the level of personal involvement in the role that is performed. A third model is derived from the interactions model but is best labelled “perceptual” because it is concerned with the processes within an individual. This is used primarily to explain religious experience within the psychology of religion (Holm, 1997:76). Its originator was Hjalmar Sundén, and his ideas have been taken up by numerous others.<sup>20</sup> This research is illuminating as it seems well adapted to combine with literary and historical study.

### 5.5.2 Perceptual Role Theory

In this theory, the interactive system is not the social world per se but is located on the level of perception. Religious traditions describe diverse roles that interact. For example, the Bible has roles for God, patriarchs, kings and prophets, among others. The God-role in the Bible can influence the believer’s perception of his or her own situation. One of the human roles in the text can be actualised by the believer to restructure a situation that is otherwise impossible to cope with. This leads to the anticipation of the God-role and the readiness to perceive the world in a new way. Through constant exposure to the interaction of God and human roles in the tradition, the believer develops a mental disposition that becomes a perceptual system through which the world is experienced. Because the interactive system described in the Bible has been fixed, succeeding generations can assimilate it, and so organise their worlds along uniform patterns, thus making religious experience reproducible. Yet, role systems are subject to continuous development, as individuals can create new roles for those who come after them. Situation, expectation, and interaction are the three elements in the role taking process (Källstad, 1982:367-68; Capps, 1982:59-60).

Sundén himself finds such a dual role situation in Augustine’s description of his experiences in reading the Psalms in his *Confessions*.

To me it seems that Augustine's reading of Psalm 4 could be looked at as a dual role-situation, a kind of dialogue between God and the author of the *Confessions*. The Holy Spirit speaks and Augustine listens, telling God how he reacts when the Spirit tells him about his true nature, revealing at the same time the divine mercy (Sundén, 1987:378).

In developing Sundén's theory further into what he calls an "integrated model", Holm observes that there is not normally a mechanical copying of the role model, but rather variation as the result of personality and external factors. A fusion of mythical roles may also be found (Holm, 1997:78).

### 5.5.3 Perceptual Role-Theory and the Hebrew Bible?

Among those who have taken to such theories is the Hebrew Bible scholar Bernhard Lang, who uses Sundén's theory to explain the psychological aspects of how people became prophets in ancient Israel. The taking up and anticipating of the dual roles (of prophet and God) results in a restructuring of experience which results in the discovery of God in one's own life (1983:104-109). It is important to note the change Lang makes: from a theory that originally explained how figures in religious literature can influence how a believing reader acts, to the way an actual institution generates new members, almost as an interactionist theory. Lang may well be justified in this, but if one is to emphasise the producers of the Persian or Hellenistic layers of composition and editing, however, perceptual role-theory has further riches, especially for those studying the brokers of divine knowledge of the Persian and Hellenistic Judaism.

Unless we think that their texts were produced *ex nihilo*, (which is highly unlikely) the second-temple era thinkers who put together the literature now comprising the Hebrew Bible were dealing with some level of tradition and a past populated with heroes and villains. The stories and poems that have been handed down to us, starring the patriarchs, judges, kings and prophets, may be only more developed forms of the figures with whom the writers themselves identified with, whose roles they adopted in some way in their own leadership of the people of Yhwh. Yet with these roles, perhaps characterized en masse as Ben Zvi's notion of the brokers of the divine knowledge, they encounter the God of their traditions in their own world. Thus, we might see a deep level of spirituality in the texts they edited, collected, and composed, as a preventative to the fallacy of propaganda that purely materialistic interpretations of the origins of this literature might lead us to.

It is difficult to study human behaviour on the basis of rational self interests alone. There are too many human variables. Therefore, one should not assume that all texts, however ideological or theological grounded, are composed solely to advance the ambitions of their authors for political influence or social status. Expressing one's deeply held beliefs, or exploring one's own divided loyalties, is not the same thing as advancing a particular system that will solve all the world's dilemmas. To a point, all texts are ideological, and yet, reducing all of prophetic literature to propaganda hardly is sufficient to explain texts like Jer 20:9.

If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. (NRSV)

Regardless of how one explains the 'inspiration' behind such writings (actual experiences with God, poetic genius, the Muses, or whatever), the scholar must not ignore the possibility that the writer was indeed exploring something deeply personal. Perhaps we might even return to Heschel's conception that the prophetic poetry was the expression of divine pathos through the prophet (1962). Perceptual-role theory may provide a theoretical basis for the exploration of how the human mind finds and gives voice to what it understands to be divine, eternal, and overwhelming.

## ***6 The Future?***

In many ways, the primacy of the Biblical Israel approach within biblical studies has lost some ground to the methodological critique of the constructionists, and more to the frequent (but not total) disinterest of its conclusions by the literature camp. It will, of course, continue, alongside new appraisals of the history of Judah and Israel. It remains to be seen, however, whether the promise of the new historical paradigm will be fulfilled, both in terms of winning widespread subscription and in making positive contributions that stand the test of time. The goal of mediating between historical contingency, historical referentiality and artistic and spiritual inspiration should not be regarded as any easier for constructionists to attain than those they wish to surpass. It would be easy for them to fall victim to many of the shortcomings they identify in the work of their forerunners and counterparts: too detailed conclusions supported by too little evidence, unexplored assumptions, and unwillingness to engage alternative perspectives, insensitivity to the artistic genius in the texts. More specifically, they would be highly susceptible to the propaganda fallacy: if biblical

Israel is constructed, it needs architects and blueprints, schemes, vested interests, rich patrons and/or gullible or goaded taxpayers. Yet, it may be wrong to reduce the texts of the Hebrew Bible to propaganda in support of such machinations, regardless of how much the ancient prophets/poets may have been domesticated, and that canonizing is itself an exercise in power and control (cf. Carroll, 1997). Perhaps mixing historical research with consideration of the Literary approach and creative social scientific research can help the historical enterprise by pointing out how much there is in the Hebrew Bible that will forever remain beyond satisfactory rational explanation. In the very least, we may find paradox and evidence of personal engagement with the divine that has little to do with overt materialistic or political ambition.

In critiquing Petersen, I hope to have outlined how radical a rethinking is needed to this end, and I have tried to illustrate how further interdisciplinary work may offer illumination for historical biblical studies. I have also illustrated how part of the foundation of this rethinking may already have been laid. This is not to say that I agree with all of the constructionist approach, or that everyone must agree with me. And despite the severity of my critique here, neither does it mean that all other work is obsolete and no longer useful. I have outlined here something of my own interests for future work, but it is not the only path to open up in recent years, nor will it be the last one. It is certainly not the case that the future of biblical studies has been determined (I claim no prophetic status)! The future is open, but the dialogue that Petersen so justifiably calls for must be drawn wider than it is imagined in his paper. I suspect that the methodological stew is far more of a feast than he would allow.

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- <sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the award of the post-doctoral fellowship, of which this paper is a result.
- <sup>2</sup> He says (p. 24) he prefers "intermediation" to "prophetic behavior", but this is not maintained consistently, cf. already p. 25.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Blenkinsopp, 1995:115-16, who discusses Weber's own more general prophetic types before analyzing the biblical titles.
- <sup>4</sup> Something noted by Blenkinsopp, 1995:124. Petersen earlier expressed the view that intermediaries do not typically have roles in the sacrificial cult (1991:192), even if some were born into the priesthood (e.g., Jeremiah or Ezekiel).
- <sup>5</sup> Mari does, however, provide useful data to understand the social institutions of prophecy in the ancient Near East. See, for instance Weinfeld, 1995 [1977]; Barstadt, 1993; Gordon, 1995c, Huffmon, 1997; Malamat, 1991. Others also point to parallels with neo-Assyrian prophetic texts and those from other ancient Near Eastern cultures, see Nissinen, 1998, Parpola, 1997; Laato, 1996:149-206.
- <sup>6</sup> There are many discussions of DtrH scholarship. Among the most useful is Mackenzie and Graham (eds. 1994). I have critiqued the whole issue of a DtrH (1998:38-73).
- <sup>7</sup> Tucker, however, maintains that the weight of biblical evidence is on the notion of prophets primarily as speakers (1987: 27).
- <sup>8</sup> See for instance, Carroll, 1997: 311, on the 'myth of the empty land' in the prophets which was never allowed to undermine the assertion in *Torah* that Israel was the only rightful owner of this territory.
- <sup>9</sup> Linville, 1998:21-22, 32, and the bibliography there.
- <sup>10</sup> Petersen quotes vol. 2, pp. 147-48 in the two volume edition of Heschel's book. I have available to me the single volume edition, of which the corresponding page numbers are 367-68.
- <sup>11</sup> Other recent appraisals are Laato, 1996; Tucker, 1997.
- <sup>12</sup> Lemche, 1998:94, comments on the circular argument between the prophets and historical traditions in the Hebrew Bible.
- <sup>13</sup> Auld's original 1983 publication was accompanied by a favourable response from Carroll and a negative one from Williamson, all three of which are reprinted in 1996. The debate was continued in Barstadt, 1993, and the bibliography can be expanded.
- <sup>14</sup> Whatever this item is, is not yet decided, neither is God's response clear. See my 1999 contribution to *Biblica* and the bibliography there.
- <sup>15</sup> See especially his *Into the Hands of the Living God* (1989). Perhaps in the section of 2 Kgs 17, Eslinger (pp. 184-217) may be criticized for employing the "fallacy of irony". See my critiques (1998:220-22; 285-95). These do not undermine the importance of his book as a contribution to understanding the

biblical texts.

- <sup>16</sup> See especially the editor's introduction (Leavitt, 1997). See also, Kugel, 1990.
- <sup>17</sup> Ben Zvi, 1996: 132-33, emphasizes their liking for multivocality on the literary level, that would have stimulated thought and, of course, re-reading.
- <sup>18</sup> Proposals of double meaning are not new, e.g., Farrar, 1890:52. See the recent articles by Ceresko, 1994, and Nobel, 1994-95, for different double meanings.
- <sup>19</sup> I explain this in a forthcoming article in *Biblical Interpretation*: "What Does 'It' Mean? Interpretation at the Point of No Return in Amos 1-2".
- <sup>20</sup> The volume that contains Holm, 1997, provides a good bibliography for Sundén, that includes *Religionen och rollerna*. Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelses bokförlag, 1959, 4th ed. 1966; and *Die Religion und die Rollen. Eine psychologische Untersuchungen der Frömmigkeit*. Berlin: Alfred Topelmann, 1966. Sundén, 1987, appears in a symposium on his thought.